

Astronaut Personal Preferences

Each crew member of a space shuttle mission is allowed to bring personal items on board with them. There is a Crew Options List from which each member gets to select items. Some items on the Crew Options List include watches, handkerchiefs, seat cushions, and safety helmets. These items are usually placed in their personal belongings locker on board the orbiter. Crew members have been known to bring along pennants or hats with their college name or logo on them, shirts, favorite books, audiotapes or compact discs of their favorite music, musical instruments, stickers, ties or special items from a family member, friend or deceased loved one.

Crew members each have a Personal Preference Kit (PPK) in which they can fly up to 20 personal items. These items have to be very small because the bag in which they are carried is only about 3" x 3" in size. Most of the time, a crew member will fly family items such as jewelry, photos and other small mementoes.

For bigger items, each mission flies the Official Flight Kit (OFK). The list of items that are stored in this kit must be approved through official NASA channels. These are usually items that are flown on requests from foreign governments, schools and other institutions like museums and professional organizations. Some of these larger items flown in the Official Flight Kit have included flags of foreign countries, patches or other special awards that would be presented later to honorees of an organization. Also, small museum pieces are flown and later displayed in that museum's exhibit. The items that are flown in the Official Flight Kit must go through a strict screening process before being approved for flight.

In some cases, crew members fly items of historical importance. For example, on STS-90 for Neurolab, crew members included microscope slides. These stained slides had been used during the neuro-research of a Spanish scientist who was one of the first scientists to study and catalog brain cells. The Smithsonian Institute requested that for one mission a piece of fabric from the original 1903 Wright Flyer be flown on a mission. Commander Eileen Collins brought with her on STS-63 the pilot's license (Federation Aeronautique Internationale) which had been granted in France to American female pilot Bobbi Trout.

Of course, the items that most crew members seem to bring with them on every mission are junk food and cameras. It will be interesting to see what special items Commander Collins will fly for her next mission (STS-93). Word has it that she will be taking along a scarf and pilot's license that had belonged to the American female aviator Amelia Earhart. So we see that between the Personal Preference Kit (PPK) and the Official Flight Kit (OFK) many personal and unique items are flown into space on every mission.

Adapted from: <http://quest.arc.nasa.gov/space/frontiers/activities/collins/box.html>